

AN EXAMINATION  
OF  
THE CHAPLAIN'S ROLE  
IN  
CIVIL/MILITARY OPERATIONS

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## Introduction

In our country we are particularly careful when situations develop where military force is required. Civil authorities are responsible for ordering and maintaining law and order. As long as they are able to fulfill this responsibility, we believe that Federal military forces should not be employed for this purpose.

When a situation develops to the extent that laws are flagrantly broken, property wantonly destroyed and lives threatened, and when the state and local civil authorities have used all of their available resources and cannot control the situation, Federal military forces may be committed.

Various legal steps, as outlined in AR500-50, must be followed before Federal forces can be used. The normal mission of military forces is to assist local authorities in the restoration of law and order.

Other situations which may lead to the use of military forces are natural disasters and internal defense. Due to the limitations of these areas will not be addressed in this paper.

Although the role of the chaplain in civil/military operations is not easy to delineate, we can learn much from history, both what should and should not be done by the chaplain. One of the most successful chaplains in this respect was John Eaton. During the Civil War (1861-1865)

Eaton saw the needs of the Negro slaves who were freed as the Union forces moved through the South. Due to his singularly successful work during the war, he was selected by General Grant to care for Negroes who flocked into Army camps. Under Grant's orders Eaton organized the freedmen into camps where provision was made for their physical needs and their education. They were set to work picking cotton on abandoned plantations and cutting wood for river steamboats.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> John Eaton, Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen, (New York: Negro University Press, 1969).

## Chapter 1

### Civil/Military Operations in the United States

The role of the chaplain with a unit that is given a mission in the civil/military area of operations does not differ essentially from the role that he experiences when his unit is committed to other missions. Naturally, these ministrations become unique due to the intensity of the situation. Personnel in the unit will be concerned, anxious, and over-scared. Families of the servicemen may also have special needs. The need for the successful execution of the mission and concern for the individuals who perform places an immense responsibility upon the operation of the chaplain.

The provision of religious rites, sacraments and worship services for the personnel of the unit are of primary importance. The nature and location of these services may vary from the norm. They may be informal, daily, and even impromptu. Flexibility will maximize the effect of these services. Careful selection of sermon topics will help the worshippers respond to God's word in the contemporary situation.

The chaplain will find increased opportunities for pastoral counseling. The fact that situations may arise in which it will be necessary to use force against a fellow American can create special emotional problems. The target area may even be his home locale.

The serviceman may have difficulty accepting orders which may be foreign to his own understanding of his role. The chaplain can be of valuable assistance to the enlisted men and also to the officers who find themselves in an unfamiliar role.

In the early phase of preparation for deployment in a garden plot situation, the chaplain can avert many future problems. This is precisely when the chaplain should be circulating among the troops to get a feeling for the concerns and fears of his unit personnel.

When the civil disturbance is racially motivated, the spillover of tension may be felt by individual soldiers. They will almost naturally identify with "their side" in the disturbance. The chaplain should diffuse this before it destroys the integrity of his unit. The chaplain who has been with his unit for a considerable length of time has a decided advantage in terms of the men knowing and trusting him.

Once the chaplain has the pulse of the troops he has to evaluate the courses of action that he feels are open to him. He may have any or all of the following:

- a. Report to the commander, giving him an assessment of the state of feeling (morale) and possible eventual expressions of those feelings.
- b. Teach a Human Self Development class, addressing the potentially tense situation. The Human Self Development Program of the Army stresses those aspects of American values which are the moral foundations of good citizenship and character development.<sup>1</sup> This could be given, after coordination with the training officer, during one of the usual periods of slack time preceding the actual deployment of troops.
- c. Maximize the opportunities to informally chat with the troops to insure them of his confidence in the unit commander and others who will be making decisions.

The chaplain should strongly remind the troops that, regardless of what social or political injustice may have been the cause of the civil disturbance, rioting and burning cannot be the best means of addressing the problem.

The chaplain can emphasize that the mission of the military forces during civil disturbances is to assist civil authorities in the restoration and maintenance of law and order and the protection of lives and property. Department of the Army guidance on this specifically states that the commander will insure that only the minimum necessary force is used to restore order.<sup>1</sup>

The chaplain should base his operations close to the military medical facility. In this way he can quickly respond to emergencies, and the troops will have a reference point when trying to locate him.

While visiting the troops wherever they are deployed, he may carry out functions other than the traditional pastoral ones. He may act as a carrier of messages, mail, or comfort items, but he should not let these activities interfere with his primary role. Never carrying arms himself, he should travel with others who are armed in order to maintain his own security and protection.

When the time and situation allows, the chaplain should coordinate with local church and church related organizations. The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Red Cross, and the United Service Organization (USO) will usually assist by providing humane services and refreshments for the troops.

The local ministerial association or diocesan headquarters should be aware of the chaplain's presence. If the local clergy are not able

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of the Army, Civil Disturbances, RM 9-15, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), Chapter 2.

military they may be valuable sources of information and assistance. If any of the local clergy are willing to tour the area with the chaplain, it would emphasize the cooperation between civilian and military needed to restore law and order. It may also be possible to arrange for the use of civilian religious facilities for collecting points for homeless civilians. This is the responsibility of the local government, but the chaplain may have the freedom to make these arrangements.

A word of caution is necessary. The mass media reporters are persistent in their efforts to get statements from persons involved in any noteworthy event. Policies are established in advance regarding persons authorized to release news items. Chaplains should learn these policies and adhere to them.

## Chapter 2

### Civil/Military Operations in Overseas Areas

The experience of Vietnam is very fresh in our memories. Vietnam had its own peculiar challenges for the chaplain as well as for the field commander. Practically every chaplain assisted the civilian population in one way or another. Depending on the mission and the location of the unit, the chaplain had varying degrees of contact with the civilians.

In units engaged in pacification there were opportunities for daily contact with civilians. In fact, the success of the unit's mission often depended, to a large degree, on the rapport it had with the civilian population.

I believe that one of the major responsibilities of chaplains in civil/military operations in overseas areas is in the area of respect for human life. The chaplain must use every means at his disposal to get the idea across to his men and officers that the civilian population must be respected and treated as kindly as the situation will allow. I have seen the American soldier in Korea as well as Vietnam. In both of these countries it became popular to use derogatory slang when referring to the local nationals. This seemingly harmless practice fosters an attitude that considers these people to be inferior, stupid, and even somewhat inhuman. From there it is only a matter of time before a serious incident may set off a "powder keg." If every chaplain in Vietnam had been more diligent in this respect, who could say how many fewer civilians

there would have been?

From information gathered by this writer during personal interviews with twelve chaplains who had served in Vietnam, it is reasonable statement to say that most commanders gave little guidance to them concerning their role in civil/military operations. With few exceptions, the degree and thrust of the chaplain's involvement came from his own initiative.

In rural areas MAFAP stations were established to upgrade the levels of medical care available to the civilians. Chaplains frequently found their services needed either in making initial contact or in sustaining these services. Sometimes the local national pastor could be persuaded to assist in the translation of diagnoses and prescriptions.

Chaplains are natural contacts for "do-gooders" who want to organize clothing drives and have tons of clothing donated to the war victims. These efforts often do more for the ego of the "do-gooder" than they do for the welfare of the recipients. If the dignity of the local national is kept in mind, other ways of helping meet the requirements for food, clothing and shelter could be found. The procurement of sewing machines to enable the local nationals to produce their own clothing, which meets their needs better than the often ill-fitting American "hand-me-downs", is a suggestion.

In most military operations there is a great deal of logistical waste: steel, cement, and lumber. With the nature of things being what they are, there is always a critical shortage of building supplies for the civilians. This is a potentially dangerous area, but when the chaplain does a thorough evaluation of the situation, there are opportunities

to obtain damaged supplies and give them to churches, schools, and orphanages to help alleviate their critical physical shortages. Careful and detailed planning with the G-5 and local national authorities is a must.

American soldiers are naturally curious. The chaplain should pass the word to his troops about any unfamiliar religious practices that the local indigenous people may have. This will reduce the incidences of embarrassing situations caused by curious soldiers unwittingly violating a religious taboo.

In conclusion, it is important to caution any chaplain about compromising his position. Each chaplain will have his own personal opinions. However, the chaplain can make a genuine contribution if he maintains communication with each segment of the civilian/military community and offers his service as an arbitrator. He will destroy his credibility if he publicly takes sides.

The chaplain has a unique ministry in civil/military operations. He must do it cautiously, wisely, sacrificially, and with initiative.

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